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“Our ideas are important and they need to be marshaled, and they need to be communicated in ways that are persuasive to the listeners...To win the war on terror, we must also win the war of ideas – the battle for the minds of those who are being recruited by terrorist networks across the globe...The task is to stop terrorists before they can terrorize. And even better, we must lean forward and stop them from becoming terrorists in the first place.”

Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld¹

“Because it is difficult to come to grips with moral and mental forces, it is tempting to exclude them from our study of war. However, any doctrine or theory that neglects these factors ignores the greater part of the nature of war.”

MCDP-I²

Introduction

The Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication *Warfighting* instructs battlestaffs to orient on the enemy. Accordingly, Marine Corps doctrine regarding Information Operations is almost exclusively oriented toward influencing the enemy. Activities are directed against the enemy’s civil and military leadership and enemy troops in the field, in support of traditional military objectives. This approach toward Information Operations seems appropriate during conventional warfare, where defeat of the enemy’s military forces leads to victory. It seems less adequate, however, in small wars where the People will likely play a decisive role in determining the victor. The outcome of small wars, in many cases, are decided not by who won the war with weapons, but who won the war with better ideas. It is often a question of which side presented a better case ideologically and emotionally, thereby winning the support of the populace. The requirement to convey our national goals and policies in a persuasive manner is therefore vital to our overall mission accomplishment.

Given that the Global War on Terror resembles a global insurgency more than it does a

conventional war, one can surmise that U.S. forces will increasingly be involved in small wars in the foreseeable future. If this is the case, then the Marine Corps must change its mindset from the limited manner in which it conducts Information Operations today, to a more holistic Ideological Operations approach in the future. In short, we must prepare to win the War of Ideas.

The purpose of this paper is to offer suggestions as to how the Marine Corps can better prosecute a War of Ideas. This will be accomplished by 1) providing a framework for understanding the War of Ideas using concepts and terms that are familiar to the professional warfighter, 2) identifying the Marine Corps' current inadequacies regarding the War of Ideas, and 3) suggesting the creation of Ideological Operations professionals to represent Ideological Operations considerations on high-level battlestaffs. This paper will focus in particular on Ideological Operations during Small Wars, but its topic is relevant to conventional conflict as well, if only to a lesser degree.

The War of Ideas

Mao Tse-Tung spoke of guerrilla insurgents as being like fish, and the People as the water in which they swim. If the water temperature is right, the fish will thrive and proliferate. If the political temperature is wrong, the cause will die a natural death. For this reason, insurgent leaders focus a great deal of their efforts toward this end, maintaining the right political temperature. Mao repeatedly charged his subordinates to "explain," "persuade," "discuss," and "convince" the people regarding his communist ideology.³ He used these words as tasks to subordinates, much as Marines would assign tactical tasks like "seize," "secure," "screen," "or

defend” to their tactical maneuver units.

During the Vietnam War, much was made of “winning hearts and minds.” This simple phrase captures the essence of the War of Ideas, for ultimately in counter-insurgency warfare the minds of the People are the objectives! And if the People’s minds are the objectives, then the decisive actions that will bring victory are those that convince the People that the alternative supported by the United States is better than that offered by the insurgents. Sometimes, that decisive action will require conventional military firepower. At other times, it may require ideological firepower. And in most instances, it will require the coordinated application of both. As military planners, we must strive to create an ideological and emotional attachment between the American-supported indigenous government and its People that will simultaneously provide strength to their military while effectively starving the insurgents of popular support.

The War of Ideas cannot be won with kinetic firepower alone. Bigger bombs and faster jets cannot create legitimacy. Destroyed tanks and toppled governments do not lead to national unity, much less the acceptance of American tutelage. Instead, the People must be persuaded intellectually, in which case the Marine Corps must re-evaluate its efforts to engage the People. We must engage them not only militarily, but intellectually as well. We must approach the War of Ideas with the same vigor and the same determination as we do conventional combat. We must apply the same concepts and the same methodologies. We must develop new capabilities in order to deliver “ideological fires” with the same precision and effect as our conventional kinetic fires. This will require the commitment of both resources and manpower. Most importantly, however, it will require the commitment of brainpower on the part of commanders and their battlestaffs.

The Ideological Battlefield

Unable to challenge US military might symmetrically, our enemies are aggressively employing ideological strategies against us. Ideological attacks offer our enemies a potentially huge payoff for very little effort or cost. A simple videotaped message released to an international news agency can have a greater impact than any military actions they might pursue. An ideological message can simultaneously deliver a devastating blow to the strongest nation in the world and create momentum for the weakest cause. Our enemies clearly understand Ideological Warfare. Do we?

Conventional wars are fought on geographical terrain employing physical force through the delivery of kinetic fires. Wars of ideas, on the other hand, are fought on intellectual terrain employing persuasive force through the delivery of ideological fires. In the future, we must not surrender the ideological battlefield to the enemy. We must identify and seize the ideologically key terrain. We must look for ways to impose fog and friction onto our enemy's ideological campaign. A convincing case must be made for the legitimacy of US policies and US military actions. American ideals like freedom and democracy are good! The United States must do a better job of advocating their virtues around the globe. Within our areas of operations, the Marine Corps has a role to play in this effort.

At the outset of conflict, war planners must identify and secure the ideologically key terrain. We must define our national policies and objectives such that we are positioned on the moral and ideological high-ground. We must ensure that our messages and our actions reinforce and defend this high-ground, rather than compromise it through inconsistency. National policies

and objectives will be defined at the highest levels of government, but the actions of every American soldier, sailor, airman and Marine will significantly impact their credibility. It is our responsibility as military leaders to understand the ideological battlespace, to recognize the ideologically key terrain, and to ensure that our tactical actions do not create gaps in our ideological battle position.

Once ideological key terrain is lost, it is extremely difficult to reclaim. The case of Iraqi prisoner abuse by American soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison provides a vivid example. This self-inflicted scandal provided Iraqi insurgents with ideological high-ground from which to attack US efforts in Iraq. Delivering extremely effective ideological fires on the exposed American position, their message condemning the maltreatment of prisoners resonated throughout the region, thereby damaging US credibility and legitimacy. It will cost the United States both time and resources to regain the confidence of the Iraqi people, and only then will we reclaim that key terrain. The avoidance of similar scandals in the future is as important to American force protection efforts as traditional security procedures or body armor.

Ideological Operations Described

So what is meant by Ideological Operations? At the Strategic Level we are talking about Public Diplomacy. At the Operational and Tactical Levels, the activities currently resident in Civil Affairs, Public Affairs and Psychological Operations (PsyOp) units cumulatively comprise our current ideological warfare capabilities. Stated differently, these specialized units constitute our current arsenal of weapons capable of delivering ideological fires. Before proceeding, a brief description of each is in order. The Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and

Associated Terms defines each of these activities as follows:

Public Diplomacy: Those overt international public information activities of the United States Government designed to promote United States foreign policy objectives by seeking to understand, inform, and influence foreign audiences and opinion makers, and by broadening the dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad.⁴

Civil Affairs: (DOD) Activities performed or supported by civil affairs that (1) enhance the relationship between military forces and civil authorities in areas where military forces are present; and (2) involve application of civil affairs functional specialty skills, in areas normally the responsibility of civil government, to enhance conduct of civil-military operations.⁵

Public Affairs: is the provision of information to the public, press and other institutions concerning the goals, policies and activities of the US Government. Public affairs seeks to foster understanding of these goals through dialogue with individual citizens and other groups and institutions, and domestic and international media. However, the thrust of public affairs is to inform the domestic audience.⁶

Psychological Operations: Planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of psychological operations is to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behavior favorable to the originator's objectives.⁷

For many, the term Psychological Operations conjures up negative connotations of propagandist misinformation. They associate PsyOps with the systematic deception of the world audience as to our true intentions. This interpretation is the furthest from the truth. Truthfulness is essential, for the smallest lie will be discovered and will be immediately harmful. It will produce distrust and destroy credibility. The United States must simply redouble its efforts to articulate its policies and goals in ways that effectively persuade global opinion. We must continue to perform the existing functions of Public Diplomacy, Psychological Operations, Civil Affairs and Public Affairs, but in a more robust, coordinated and effective manner.

In the past, military planners have viewed these activities as supporting actions relative to conventional military campaigns. In the future, it may be more helpful to view conventional kinetic military actions as supporting actions relative to ideological campaigns. This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of counter-insurgency operations. And again, whereas the Global War on Terror in many ways resembles counter-insurgency warfare, this perspective may have some very timely relevance.

Ideological Targets

The targets of our ideological fires may be enemy, friendly, neutral or undecided. This being the case, a one-size-fits-all approach to Ideological Operations seems wholly inadequate. In order to service each of these target sets effectively, we must develop a comprehensive targeting plan that delivers customized messages to each audience while retaining consistency throughout. In other words, the over-arching ideals being advocated to all audiences must be consistent while the specific arguments being proffered to individual audiences may vary in their approach. This being the case, a separate method of delivery will likely be needed for each distinct audience.

As with planners of kinetic fires, ideological planners will categorize targets as either point targets or area targets. The desired methods for delivering ideological fires will vary according to the type of target. Point targets for ideological fires may be specific influential government, military or religious leaders who can influence the behavior and opinions of larger bodies of people. In the case of point targets, precise and discrete methods of delivery are often desirable in order to avoid the public perception that the individual target is being manipulated

by the American government. We want to persuade the influential member without corrupting their public influence. For this type of precision targeting, methods of delivery might include email messages, telephone calls, text messaging, personal contact, courier or formal diplomatic dialogue. The critical component is that the number of people who are aware of the communication is minimized to avoid compromising the target's political freedom of action.

Area targeting of ideological fires amounts to appealing directly to the people themselves. Area targets are larger populations of people who can be targeted through widely disseminated mass media channels. Television and radio messages, press conferences, news releases, embedded reporters, pamphlets, leaflet drops and loudspeaker operations are examples of area targeting of ideological fires. Area fires can be directed toward entire populations or specific subsets of populations, as appropriate. For example, some messages could be developed for the entire Iraqi population, while others may be customized specifically for the Kurdish members of that population. While these two messages may be distinctly different, it is critical that the over-arching ideals being advanced be consistent in both.

Offensive & Defensive Ideological Operations

Defensive operations are often conducted with the immediate purpose of retaining tactical, strategic, or political objectives. Defensive ideological fires accomplish this by reinforcing existing opinions among friendly populations that generally accept US policies and objectives as morally legitimate. We cannot afford to take existing popular public opinion for granted. We must continually reinforce our positive message, even among those who share our ideology. Defensive Ideological Operations will fall almost exclusively under the realm of

Public Affairs.

Offensive operations are conducted to take the initiative from the enemy, gain freedom of action, and mass effects to achieve objectives. Offensive ideological fires accomplish this by persuading the enemy, the neutral and the undecided populations of the world to accept and endorse US policies and goals. Offensive Ideological Operations require persuasive messages that appeal directly to the personal interests of the target audiences. Customized messages will be required for subsets of the broader population in order to achieve optimal effectiveness. Offensive Ideological Operations will require the integrated efforts of PsyOps, Civil Affairs and Public Affairs elements all advocating common themes.

The Nature of Ideological Warfare

Friction and uncertainty will prevail on the ideological battlefield, just as they have historically prevailed on the kinetic battlefield. Due to the influential role of the human dimension on the War of Ideas, fluidity, disorder, complexity, violence and danger will lurk around every corner. As in the previous example of Abu Ghraib, the prisoner abuse scandal instantaneously developed into a crisis of monumental proportions. Battlestaff planners stood little chance of anticipating or avoiding this specific crisis. It quickly became their role, however, to deal with this crisis and verify to the world audience that the United States understood the seriousness of the allegations and that appropriate actions were being taken to remedy the situation. In the future, we must strive to minimize our own fog and friction, while working to maximize that of our foe.

The concept of combined arms can be applied to Ideological Operations as well. We

must develop ideological strategies that place the enemy “on the horns of a dilemma.” We must take away his freedom of action by challenging his methods and his ideology. We must identify inconsistencies in the enemy’s actions and messages in order to exploit them as gaps. By drawing focused public attention to these inconsistencies, we create a dilemma for our foe. He must either discontinue the particular action or suffer a blow to the moral legitimacy of his cause. An example of this might be the condemnation of specific insurgent acts that are clearly inconsistent with religious principles that are widely held by the populace. As kinetic actions that result in significant collateral damage are inherently damaging to the winning of hearts and minds, American denunciation of insurgent violence may eventually lead to his alienation by the general public.

Our foes have proven effective at this. Whenever US forces take decisive military action against insurgent strongholds, insurgent voices condemn our actions as heavy-handed. But when US forces attempt to avoid the collateral damage associated with decisive actions, anti-American advocates around the globe scoff at our impotence. As a result, American credibility suffers a massive body-blow regardless which course of action we choose. We must turn the tables and create similar dilemmas for our enemies.

Ideologically, the enemy is inside our OODA Loop. We seem content to merely respond to his ideological attacks. Instead, we must seize the initiative, assume the offensive, and aggressively pursue our enemy’s vacant ideology. We must intellectually back the insurgents up against the ropes and pound away with a tempo that exceeds his ability to respond. We must aggressively attack the gaps in his ideology to drive a wedge between the insurgents and the populace.

Single Battle Concept for Ideological Operations

Ideological Operations can be employed either as Advanced Force Operations, Decisive Operations or as Security and Stabilization Operations. The United States Marine Corps' Single Battle framework provides the commander and his staff with an organized way to ensure that they consider in planning and execution all essential elements of successful military operations.⁸

This battlespace organization envisions close, deep and rear operations that can be categorized according to either time and/or space. Though designed for conventional military operations at the tactical level of war, this framework can easily be applied to ideological operations at the strategic, operational and tactical levels as well.

Deep operations shape the battlespace to influence future operations. They seek to create windows of opportunity for decisive action, restrict the enemy's freedom of action, and disrupt the cohesion and tempo of his operations. Deep operations help the commander seize the initiative and set the conditions for close operations.⁹ On the ideological battlefield, deep operations will orient toward those audiences that are not immediately effected by a given US policy or military action, but whose ideas and perceptions we desire to shape for the future. At the tactical level of war, deep ideological operations may be conducted in the commander's deep conventional battlespace. At the operational and strategic levels, deep ideological operations may be oriented toward influencing regional neighbors or the global audience as a whole.

Close operations project power against enemy forces in immediate contact and are often decisive actions.¹⁰ On the ideological battlefield, close operations will orient toward those regions, nations, or communities directly effected by a given US policy or military action.

Again, at the tactical level of war, close ideological operations may be conducted within the commander's area of operations, in his close conventional battlespace. At the operational and strategic levels, close ideological operations may be oriented toward influencing the entire theater of operations, the entire population of a country, or those regional neighbors with significant interests in the region.

Rear operations support deep and close operations and facilitate future operations by securing the freedom of action of the force, and by providing the necessary continuity of operations, logistics, and command and control.¹¹ On the ideological battlefield, rear operations will orient toward the domestic audiences of the United States and its coalition partners, providing honest, transparent assessment of US policies and activities.

This single battle concept is equally relevant whether planners are working at the strategic, operational or tactical levels of war. At each level, battlestaffs will identify Areas of Operations, Areas of Influence and Areas of Interest that will overlap one another. As the effects of their ideological efforts will likely spill across assigned battlefield boundaries, the importance of integrated planning between higher, subordinate and adjacent organizations cannot be overemphasized. Though the United States government does not speak with a single voice, it is imperative that its multitude of voices be coordinated with one another. Like a choir, we must learn to integrate the complex rhythms and melodies resonating from various voices into a harmonious performance that is both persuasive and convincing to the audience. Whereas a single voice that is out of synch or out of key can easily destroy the beauty of a song, a single message or action that is inconsistent with American policies or objectives can irreparably disrupt the effects of our ideological operations campaign.

USMC Inadequacies

If it is true that the actions of an individual, or an isolated group of individuals, can have a dramatic impact on the ideological landscape, then it seems apparent that the deliberate actions of entire tactical military formations can be potentially devastating. Accordingly, the need for early coordination between military planners designing the conventional kinetic campaign and those designing the ideological campaign is apparent. The United States Marine Corps, however, is not currently organized to facilitate this requirement.

The Marine Corps currently retains the entirety of its Civil Affairs capability within its reserve component. Meanwhile, it relies exclusively on the US Army to provide its Psychological Operations support. In time of crisis, battlestaffs are augmented by US Army and USMCR officers specifically trained in these areas. As such, USMC battlestaffs routinely lack the resident subject matter experts they require to properly plan for ideological operations on an ongoing basis. If they cannot properly plan for ideological operations, then one must ask whether or not they can properly plan for conventional kinetic combat, for the connection between the two is integral to achieving decisive action. In many cases, tactical maneuver planning has been nearly completed by the time the augment personnel arrive. The ideological objectives are therefore relegated to a secondary status, being developed in support of tactical operations, instead of being developed simultaneously to achieve decisive action. The winning of the War of Ideas cannot continue to be an afterthought. Marine battlestaffs need trained ideological warfighters permanently assigned in order to truly integrate their expertise into the planning process.

Furthermore, once augments to the battlestaff do arrive, they are often not fully integrated into the planning process. Due to the lack of knowledge and understanding of the augmentee's unique skills, the new members are often underutilized. When they arrive on the scene, the battlestaff is inevitably experiencing a high operational tempo that is not conducive to introducing new members to the team. Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations planners must therefore be permanent members of the team. Personal relationships and professional cross-training must occur before crisis planning begins. The coordination between conventional planners and ideological planners must be habitual, based on established personal relationships.

That these Low Density/High Demand Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations units represent some of the most overworked troops in the American armed forces only exacerbates the problem. Maintaining continuous support for a large-scale crisis over an extended period is nearly impossible. This must change! The Marine Corps must invest the money and manpower necessary to maintain Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations planners on a permanent basis. It must develop adequate depth in these high-demand occupational fields in order to provide battlestaffs with the ideological support that they require over an extended time.

A Proposed Solution

As Marines, we are rightfully defensive when it comes to trading tooth for tail. We must, however, start thinking of Ideological Operations as tooth instead of tail. We must start thinking of Civil Affairs, Public Affairs and Psychological Operations activities as the delivery of ideological fires. At the very least, it is possible for the Marine Corps to train Ideological Operations planners, but still rely on US Army and USMCR units for production capabilities and

operations teams.

What kind of ideological planners do we need? We don't need lieutenants! What is needed are career-level officers (Captains, Majors and Lieutenant Colonels) who can represent Ideological Operations considerations on high-level battlestaffs. Company-grade experience in a combat arms MOS would provide a strong background for an officer to transition to an Ideological Planner MOS. The current practice of using artillery officers who understand the targeting process as Information Operations planners is a step in the right direction. But they inevitably spend too much time gaining an understanding of their new functional area, learning the capabilities, requirements and measures of effectiveness associated with Ideological Operations.

Cultural understanding is critical to an effective Ideological Operations plan. Foreign Area Officers / Regional Area Officers must be integral to the Ideological Operations planning cell within the USMC battlestaff. The Marine Corps currently trains a limited number of FAOs/RAOs each year, but then institutionally discriminates against them come promotion time. As a result, we end up with very few officers with the needed cultural knowledge in our ranks.

The current FAO/RAO training pipeline may provide an ideal path toward becoming an Ideological Operations Planner. If supplemented with Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations training, a FAO or RAO would be well armed with the cultural knowledge needed to integrate the efforts of Civil Affairs, Public Affairs and Psychological Operations units within a Marine tactical area of operations. Additionally, this approach would provide a logical career progression for FAOs/RAOs that would provide promotion opportunities and thereby ensure that we retain their expertise within our Corps.

Current battlestaffs are poorly staffed to pursue aggressive ideological strategies. For starters, infantry and artillery officers are not trained or conditioned to pursue such strategies, nor would I suggest that they should be. But more importantly, current battlestaffs have a full plate simply dealing with conventional military operations. Additional personnel with specialized training are needed to fill this requirement. Permanently assigned to Marine battlestaffs, Ideological Operations planners could raise Information Operations to the appropriate status.

Conclusion

In his book *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, Colonel Harry Summers recalls an exchange between an American colonel and a North Vietnamese colonel after the war. In it the American points out to his former foe, “You know you never defeated us on the battlefield.” To this the Vietnamese officer replied “That may be so, but it is also irrelevant.”¹² This exchange exposes America’s failure to win the War of Ideas in that tragic conflict. American military superiority alone could not win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. Better ideas and better alternatives were required.

While we cannot expect to change other societies and cultures on our own, we cannot just surrender the ideological battlefield by doing nothing. As Marines, we must adjust our mindset by adopting a doctrinal framework that acknowledges the significant role of ideology in counter-insurgency warfare. We must identify our current institutional shortcomings and take actions to remedy them. Once engaged on the battlefield, Marine battlestaffs must develop strategies to seize the ideological initiative, integrating conventional combat operations with Ideological

Operations in order to achieve synergistic effects. In short, we must aggressively wage and win the War of Ideas.

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12. Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982), 1.